

## Media Release

**From:** Boone County Conservation District (BCCD)

**Topic:** Acquisition of Important Conservation Lands

### The Details:

#### 1. *Silberhorn Site:*

1.1. BCCD purchased 25.0-acres along the Kishwaukee River near Garden Prairie, Illinois.

1.2. Purchase price was \$111,000.00

1.3. Funding Sources:

1.3.1. Grand Victoria Foundation – Vital Lands Grant Program purchase conservation easement - \$42,500.00

1.3.2. 2003 Open Land Trust (OLT) grant from Illinois Department of Natural Resources (funds are restricted to land purchases located within the Crow’s Foot Conservation Study Area) funded balance of purchase price - \$68,500.00.

1.3.3. Openlands Inc., provided technical assistance with this acquisition (grant writing, grant administration, establishment of the conservation easement, administration and monitoring of the conservation easement, and other vital functions).

1.4. This site will be named the *Silberhorn Conservation Area*.

#### 2. *Sisson Site:*

2.1. BCCD purchased 28.81-acres adjacent to the Piscasaw Creek north of Belvidere.

2.2. Purchase Price was \$180,500.00

2.3. Funding Sources:

2.3.1. The Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation’s Natural Lands grant program provided \$144,400 toward the purchase of this property. This grant award reflects an 80% funding level and represents the highest allocation that this grant program will consider!

2.3.2. The BCCD funded the balance of the purchase price and due diligence costs with dedicated funds received by local land/cash ordinance fees.

2.3.3. Openlands Inc., provided technical assistance with this acquisition.

2.4. This site will be named “*Savanna Oaks Conservation Area*.”

These two new conservation areas have been established to help preserve important habitats and expand public opportunity for passive recreation. Both sites are identified as critical and sensitive lands by the Boone and Winnebago County Regional Greenways Plan, the Boone County Comprehensive Plan, and the Boone County Conservation District’s (BCCD) Master Plan. We use these resources to ensure our efforts with land acquisition are focused on implementing our mission and purpose. All well and good – but sometimes it’s nice to hear the story in the background.

## The Stories:

- **The Silberhorn Conservation Area:**

Doug and Susie had invited Roger Gustafson, the Boone County Conservation District's first executive director, to take a walk on their property by the Kishwaukee River. During that walk Roger quickly pointed out several plants whose roots were tied to the area's natural history. Several sprawling oaks and tall, straight hickories guarded clusters of spring wildflowers growing under their burly branches. The walk with Roger left an impression that mixed well with the Silberhorn's desire to leave this site undisturbed. The family long enjoyed picnics, observing wildlife, and taking breaks at their glade for a little personal solitude.

In 2013 Doug Silberhorn suddenly passed away. Susie and the family wanted to create a conservation area along the Kishwaukee River - one of Doug's favorite spots. Existing BCCD commitments had postponed that effort until now. We are grateful for the family's patience as pieces of the acquisition puzzle have finally fallen into place.

Assistance from the fantastic staff at Openlands helped obtain funding from the Grand Victoria Foundation's Vital Lands Grant Program. These funds were paired with funding from an Open Land Trust grant award dedicated to land acquisition in the Crow's Foot Conservation Study Area, which helped turn the Silberhorn family's dream into a reality. We are pleased to finally move forward to preserve this small, but important part of the Kishwaukee River's ecosystem. The site will provide our public with new opportunities to see wildlife, fish, picnic, and otherwise enjoy this beautiful natural setting.



*Figure 1. Silberhorn Conservation Area*

- **The Savanna Oaks Conservation Area:** Boone County is generally not on most people’s radar when it comes to relics of natural awe and wonder. That is a shame, because there are some truly unique and wonderful patches of natural history still growing here. Piskasaw Creek still shows off its natural heritage as it winds sinuously across the countryside.

Savanna Oaks Conservation Area is the result of an unplanned diversion from the normal route taken between point A and point B. This patch of widely spaced burr oak and hickory trees standing over a lush growth of grasses had caught our eye of appreciation numerous times in the past. But last July we noticed something different as we drove past the cows casually chewing their cud and minding their calves under the shade of those burly oaks. A for sale sign proclaimed that this relic patch of living history had a willing seller!

In most circumstances it is nearly impossible for our local conservation district to respond quickly. To be short – it is a complex process to acquire important conservation lands. The Conservation District must find funding, verify that the site meets a list of important land acquisition criteria, and there needs to be a willing seller. Speeding through this process is very challenging, especially for the funding aspect.

Without funding, this opportunity was not going to move forward. We reached out to the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation (ICECF), who has financially supported many conservation projects in Boone County. Jolie Krasinski is the Natural Lands Grant Program Director and was our point of contact. The timing of this opportunity did not align with the grant program’s funding cycle. Jolie quickly consulted with the ICECF board of directors to see if a grant request could be submitted and evaluated to coincide with the landowner’s unique circumstances. The answer was itself a gift, we could prepare and submit a grant proposal requesting up to 80 percent of the purchase price.

Today we can celebrate the creation of a new 28-acre conservation area that preserves an authentic, living relic of Illinois’s natural history. You can add to the success of this story by reaching out to thank Jolie and the board of the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation for their rapid response to this unique conservation opportunity!



Figure 2. Savanna Oaks Conservation Area

**Additional Supporting information:**

These important conservation lands were acquired with technical assistance provided by the dedicated staff with Openlands, whose mission is stated as: “*Openlands protects natural and open spaces of northeastern Illinois and the surrounding region to ensure cleaner air and water, protect natural habitats and wildlife, and help balance and enrich our lives.*” Assistance from Openlands has been an essential part of many land conservation efforts here in Boone County over the last several years.

**For Follow-up or more information, Please Contact:**

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